

Commissioner's Letter

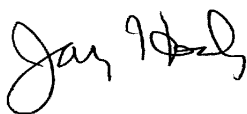
Dear Friend:

I've recently come from national agricultural meetings that have discussed the next federal farm bill. It is very interesting to me that ninety three percent of North Dakota farming income comes from federal farm bill payments. Here in Massachusetts I doubt that even one per cent of farm income comes from federal farm subsidies because markets drive our farm economy. We are trying to educate our federal decision-makers about farm viability and ag business training programs that help our economy through profitable ag businesses rather than pure subsidies.

One of the tools we are missing here, however, is an appropriate agricultural financing mechanism for farm businesses that wish to expand, diversify, or add-value to their wholesale ventures. More than 45 other states (Massachusetts not included) have agricultural bond financing mechanisms ("aggie bonds") that provide farmers with lower than market interest loan programs. The aggie bonds have helped spur more profitable agricultural businesses which, in turn, help strengthen the agricultural land base when developers knock on the doors.

In response to this need, a broad group of legislators, Farm Bureau, the Department, and others are supporting a comprehensive farm viability act, which could make Massachusetts the national leader in market-oriented agricultural policy and economic development programs. Stay tuned for further information on this important legislation which could ensure the continued availability of fresh local food and stewardship of 570,000 acres of open space through a series of incentives, financing mechanisms, and business programs for our farming community.

Sincerely,



Jay Healy
Commissioner

News & Issues

APR Program

Representative Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington) recently filed a bill designed to maintain the availability of affordable Massachusetts farmland for agricultural use. The legislation addresses a new real estate market trend that is threatening to thwart one of the main objectives of the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

"There is now a class of real estate buyers, many of whom have little or no interest in agriculture, who are willing to pay significantly above the agricultural value for an APR farm for the opportunity of living on a beautiful, pastoral property surrounded by protected open space," explains Kulik. The conversion of APR farms into estate-type properties is, in most cases, directly linked to whether or not there is a house or a potential for a house on the property.

The new legislation would authorize the state Commissioner of Food and Agriculture to approve, upon requisite findings of the Agricultural Land Preservation Committee, the release of one house lot from farmland protected under the APR program prior to 1992. DFA is working with the Mass. Farm Bureau on amendments to the legislation that would address farmer concerns.

Northeast Dairy Compact

U.S. Senators and Congressmen are being urged to support legislation that will be introduced early in this Congress to re-authorize the Dairy Compact. The legislation enjoyed substantial support in the 106th Congress, but there is still much opposition.

The Dairy Compact is important to our state's economy and to the stabilization of our milk supply. It is equally important to consumers who steadily see supermarket prices for milk increase even as prices paid to farmers for the same milk decrease.

Information packets have been sent to U.S. Senators and Representatives detailing the importance of the Dairy Compact and urging their support.

Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture
251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1700, fax 617-626-1850
www.massdfa.org

Foot & Mouth Disease

DFA and its Bureau of Animal Health are concerned about the recent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom and Europe and we are committed to keeping this devastating livestock disease out of Massachusetts and the United States.

The primary responsibility of keeping foreign animal diseases out of the US rests with the US Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). DFA representatives recently met with APHIS New England staff and we have pledged to cooperate with APHIS in the important work of keeping FMD out of the country.

DFA has embarked on an information campaign to alert the public and especially the agricultural community about FMD and we have increased our visits to farms, auctions, livestock dealers and other facilities where cloven-hoofed animals are kept. Further information is available from the Bureau of Animal Health at 617-626-1795 or on the DFA web site at www.massdfa.org.

Cranberry Crisis

Cranberry production in Massachusetts totaled 1.85 million barrels in 2000, one percent below the previous year's output. Growers harvested 13,900 acres, 1,100 fewer acres than the previous year, and the smallest acreage harvested in the state since 1994. Total value of the crop was \$36.5 million.

In 2000, the cranberry industry agreed to producer quotas in response to the dramatic drop in berry prices in 1999. Administered by the Cranberry Marketing Committee, the purpose of the regulation was to reduce the number of cranberries sold to eventually raise the price cranberry growers receive.

The preliminary 2000 cranberry price averaged \$20.30 per barrel, up from last year's average price of \$16.80 but still below the 1998 average price of \$30.80.

FY2002 Budget

DFA encourages support for an additional \$100,000 in the FY2002 budget to fund the Children's Protection Act. Additionally, DFA seeks level funding to maintain level services. The Department is always looking for new and better ways to enhance Massachusetts agriculture through our programs. Suggestions on our budget issues are always welcome and we appreciate any opportunity to discuss the fiscal circumstances facing our agency.

DFA Directory

For more information, please call or e-mail the contacts below or visit www.massdfa.org.

Commissioner

Jay Healy, 617-626-1701, Jay.Healy@state.ma.us

Chief of Staff

Kent Lage, 617-626-1702, Kent.Lage@state.ma.us

Administration & Fiscal

Alisha Bouchard, 617-626-1716,
Alisha.Bouchard@state.ma.us

Land Use/APR

Rich Hubbard, 508-792-7712,
Richard.Hubbard@state.ma.us

Regulatory Services and Pesticide Bureau

Brad Mitchell, 617-626-1771,
Brad.Mitchell@state.ma.us

Farm Products and Plant Industries

George Porter, 617-626-1800,
George.Porter@state.ma.us

Dairy Services and Animal Health

Jim Hines, 617-626-1810, James.Hines@state.ma.us

Agricultural Development and Markets

Mary Jordan, 617-626-1750, Mary.Moffitt@state.ma.us

Fairs

Steve Quinn, 617-626-1740, Steve.Quinn@state.ma.us

Farm Viability Enhancement Program

Craig Richov, 508-792-7712, Craig.Richov@state.ma.us

Agro-Environmental Technology Program and

Ag. Environmental Enhancement Program

Susan Phinney, 617-626-1772,
Susan.Phinney@state.ma.us

Aquaculture

Scott Soares, 617-626-1730, Scott.Soares@state.ma.us

Education & Outreach

Janet Christensen, 617-626-1735,
Janet.Christensen@state.ma.us

Special Programs

Mary Greendale, 508-429-2813,
Mary.Greendale@state.ma.us

Legal

Larry McCormick, 617-626-1705,
Larry.McCormick@state.ma.us

Communications and Media Information

Diane Baedeker Petit, 617-626-1752,
Diane.Baedeker@state.ma.us